

The Magic Number Is Seven

Calvin Campbell

Have you ever wondered why you have trouble memorizing Modules? Maybe it's because the Modules are too long. The following quote can be found at this URL <https://www.allconnect.com/blog/why-we-use-7-digits-and-other-fun-facts>

“The magical number 7 (plus or minus 2)

Our short-term memory is a finite resource. Countless psychological experiments have shown that, on average, many of us are limited in terms of the amount of information we can receive, process and remember.

In fact, the longest sequence a normal person can recall on the fly contains about seven items. This limit, which psychologist George Miller dubbed as the “magical number seven” in 1956, explains some of the bounds on our capacity for processing information. And so, the pattern of using 2-digit and 5-digit sequences combined with rhyming patterns of certain number sequences made for more memorable phone numbers.”

Every observation in the quote above about telephone numbers applies directly to square dance calling. If a caller is using any kind of a square dance Module string longer than seven “basics”, the caller may find difficulty in memorizing the Module. This applies to all callers. It's the way all our brains work.

The obvious answer to this problem is to not try and memorize Modules longer than seven basics. Is this practical? Sure it is. Most Modules that have been published are composed of strings of “basics” of less than seven “basics.” Many longer Modules can be

shortened to strings of seven “basics” or fewer.

Many years ago I decided that my memory was a finite resource. In my case, a very finite resource. I decided I wasn't going to bother to memorize any Module longer than eight “basics” in length. By using shorter Modules, I found that I had more control over the sets. If squares broke down, I could restore all the sets to a Static Square quickly. I could also have more ways to recombine the Modules.

I fudged on that with some Modules. Why? Because I found Modules that fit another feature of the human brain quoted from above. “The pattern of using 2-call and 5-call sequences combined with rhyming patterns of certain sequences made for more memorable Modules.” I try and find Modules that have rhyming patterns of certain “basics.”

In the last 45 years I also discovered several other things about short Modules. Dancers need to be rewarded frequently for their efforts. Dancers only recognize when they have returned to their original home position. This occurs frequently at the end of properly designed Modules.

Dancers enjoy shorter Modules better than longer Modules. You see the magic number of seven applies to dancing as well as calling. Any sequence of square dance movements longer than eight steps is often tedious for dancers to dance. If you want to see this in action, call an Eight-Chain-Thru. This “basic” takes 16 steps to complete. You will see the dancers becoming bored after eight steps. I would never consider building a theme tip around Eight-Chain-Thru figures.

